



SERVICE-LEARNING

200 W. Baltimore Street • Baltimore MD 21201 • Nancy S. Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools

Revised October 2001

Why is it called service-learning instead of community service or volunteering?

The term “community service” carries connotations of restitution for committing a non-violent crime. It does not address the vital learning that takes place as a result of participating in service-learning activities.

Volunteering refers to a person demonstrating good will by offering time and energy to address a need. This is not a structured learning experience.

What is the service-learning graduation requirement?

To receive a Maryland High School Diploma, students will complete one of the following:

- 75 hours of student service with preparation and reflection which, at the discretion of the local school system, may begin during the middle grades; or
- A locally designed program in student service that has been approved by the State Superintendent of Schools.

What will my child get out of fulfilling the service-learning requirement?

Students involved in service-learning typically demonstrate social, personal, and intellectual growth and development. They increase their teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills. Their self-respect increases as they see they can tackle tough problems and succeed. Service-learning also helps them see their roles as citizens and as active participants in solving community problems.

Won't this requirement take class time away from the basics?

Teaching students how to be involved citizens is a basic and has traditionally been one of the primary purposes of public schools. The State Board of Education passed the requirement in support of the “book learning” that occurs daily in our schools.

Service-learning is also a method for improving classroom learning. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has endorsed required service-learning. We know that many students learn best with a combination of lectures, seat work, and active, purposeful experiences. For instance, when students study chemistry, they can test a local stream for its acidic content. Based on their evaluation, they may decide how best to help clean up the stream or advocate for better water quality as a matter of public policy.

What kinds of projects are students actually doing?

Each jurisdiction has developed its own service program. Some are making service a part of all social studies classes; others are developing projects in middle school which integrate English, science, math and social studies with service. Local school systems are best equipped to determine what is appropriate for their students. For example:

- Biology classes at C. Milton Wright High School, Harford County, grew submerged aquatic vegetation known as wild celery in their classrooms as part of the Grasses in Classes project sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Students then planted the grasses in the Bay to help improve the overall health of the Bay.
- Fairmount-Harford High School students in Baltimore City are all involved in renovating an abandoned community lot. This multidisciplinary project has students designing and maintaining the lot. So far they have mapped and cleared the lot, researched and planted appropriate vegetation, and built picnic tables and a gazebo.
- Stevensville Middle School students in Queen Anne's County engage in a project called Serving Seniors, a service-learning unit connected to math, science, social studies, and language arts/reading classes in partnership with the Department of Aging. Students define service-learning, study citizenship, and become aware of community needs, especially the changing physical and mental characteristics of aging. Students then develop relationships with elderly residents of their community who are living in nursing homes or are involved with a senior center.

How will students receiving special education services be affected by this requirement?

Special education students have been performing all kinds of service, including planting trees, assisting the elderly, and making wooden toys for day care children. Students receiving special education services are expected to fulfill the graduation requirement, and the majority will do so. A student's Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee can, however, decide not to include service-learning in a student's individual education plan if service would be inappropriate due to the nature and severity of the student's disability.

Who will be responsible to make sure my child meets the requirement?

Ultimately, your child is responsible for meeting the requirement. Each school system, however, will help by providing opportunities for students to engage in service in the school, through classroom-based projects, through school-sponsored extra-curricular activities, by accepting service performed at outside organizations, and by keeping a cumulative record of students' service.

For more information, call 410-767-0358 (Baltimore area) or 1-800-489-8366 (toll free).

Visit the Maryland Student Service Alliance website at www.mssa.sailorsite.net.

Maryland State Department of Education, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201 ♦ www.msde.state.md.us
